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FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0684
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI 0069

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000952

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [LH](#) [GG](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIAN FM ADVOCATES PATIENCE TO GEORGIA, MAKES
GEORGIA'S CASE TO EU

REF: VILNIUS 938

Classified By: Pol/Econ officer Rebecca Dunham for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Lithuania's Foreign Minister Vaitiekunas visited Georgia October 12 to pitch the Georgians on a strategy of de-escalation in order to garner international support for their positions in territorial conflicts while easing current tensions with Russia. Vaitiekunas relied on his trip to pitch Georgia's case to EU Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg October 17 in an effort to elicit strong EU conclusions on Georgia-Russia relations. End Summary.

Lithuanian FM pitches strategy to Georgia

¶2. (C) Vaitiekunas traveled to Tbilisi October 12 to present the Georgians with "a three-point strategy" (about which he had previously consulted with us and EU Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner) to garner international support and ease current tensions with Russia. He was the first EU Foreign Minister to visit the Georgian capital since the onset of the current Russian-Georgian showdown. Head of the MFA's Russia/CIS Department Arunas Vinciunas accompanied the Minister and debriefed us October 17 on Vaitiekunas's meetings with President Saakashvili, Parliamentary Speaker Burjanadze, PM Noghaideli and FM Bezhoushvili, among others. Vinciunas said the Georgians seemed willing to listen, but did not necessarily agree with Lithuania's call for patience. Vaitiekunas urged all of his interlocutors to follow a "three-point strategy":

-- Be patient. Time is on Georgia's side. Calmer rhetoric about territorial disputes and a focus on reforms in Georgia will attract European and world opinion to Georgia's side in the face of ongoing Russian provocations.

-- Use CIS formats to intensify dialogue with Russia's other neighbors. Vaitiekunas recommended that Georgia reach out to CIS chair Kazakhstan to make its case.

-- Engage with Turkey to increase economic ties.

Saakashvili: "Time is not on our side"

¶3. (C) Vinciunas said that Saakashvili appeared calmer than on past visits. Saakashvili listened to Vaitiekunas's points, but had, in Vinciunas's opinion, already made his decision about a course of action. "Time is not on our side," Saakashvili reportedly replied to Vaitiekunas's advice. Vaitiekunas told Saakashvili that it would take two to three months to shift opinion in the EU. "Too long," Saakashvili reportedly said. Saakashvili told the Minister

that Russia is pressuring the Abkhaz leader to take military action in the Kodori Gorge, and that if they do, Georgia will retaliate. Vinciunas said that he personally believed Saakashvili's threat of retaliation, but that Lithuanian Ambassador to Georgia Richardas Degutis thought that Saakashvili was just delivering that talking point but would not, ultimately, retaliate and open the door for a war with Russia.

Georgians skeptical of CIS formats

¶4. (C) Georgian interlocutors were skeptical of Vaitiekunas's suggestion to use CIS formats to garner support for Georgia's cause among Russia's neighbors. Vaitiekunas suggested that Georgia engage CIS chair Kazakhstan to make sure that other CIS states understand Georgia's position. The Georgians replied that they have been engaging Kazakhstan: FM Bezhuashvili recently met with the Kazakh FM in Brussels and will travel to Kazakhstan soon. The Georgian interlocutors were nonetheless downbeat about using the CIS format to try to build support for Georgia's claims. Bezhuashvili reportedly explained that Georgia feared that if it raised discussion of Georgia-Russia relations, other CIS countries would ultimately be forced not to support Georgia, and the result would be a counterproductive and discouraging show of support for Russia. Vaitiekunas made the case that a negative reaction could also benefit Georgia by showing Europe that the CIS mandate is useless. Lithuania could use such a result to put pressure on those EU member states that believe that Georgia-Russia relations are not their business.

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Georgia seeking economic engagement with Turkey
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¶5. (SBU) Vinciunas told us that the Minister was preaching to the choir on the third point suggesting engagement with Turkey. Georgian Minister for European Integration Baramidze had recently talked with Barroso as part of his efforts to persuade the EU to allow Turkey to enter a free trade agreement with Georgia.

Pitching Georgia's case to the EU

¶6. (C) While preaching calm to Georgia's leaders, Lithuania was pushing its EU colleagues to take a stronger stance in support of Georgia. The MFA's EU office told us that the Minister wanted to visit Georgia before the October 17 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) so that he could report on the situation to the Council and raise Lithuania's credibility as it negotiated Council Conclusions on Georgia. Lithuania found little support among EU colleagues for its language, which called Russia's actions "disproportionate" and called on Russia to cease sanctions against Georgia (reftel). Several of Lithuania's points nevertheless survive in the ultimate GAERC conclusions. Vinciunas told us that Lithuania successfully defended against the French position to kill the conclusions altogether and a "surprise" effort by Greece to insert "Russian language" about relying on the existing negotiating framework (i.e., the Joint Control Commission) for the disputes, which Vinciunas dismissed as "bull."

Lithuania's position

¶7. (C) Lithuania's strong advocacy for Georgia has broad support throughout the GOL. Lithuania's parliament overwhelmingly passed a resolution on October 17, calling on

Russia to drop all sanctions against Georgia, and lift the suspension of transport and communication ties. It calls Russia's actions "disproportionate" and urges both parties to resume political dialogue to find a means for peace and stability in the South Caucasus that recognizes Georgia's "sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Comment

18. (C) The Foreign Ministry prepared for this trip with great care, starting with the Foreign Minister's discussion with Ferrero-Waldner and meeting with the Ambassador before the trip to preview trip themes.
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